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CIA, Justice feud over using Mexico bugs to get kingpins

By Michael Hedges
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The CIA and Justice Department are feuding over whether information from a wiretap operation in Mexico should be used to prosecute top-level drug traffickers, officials of both agencies said yesterday.

Justice Department sources said wiretap transcripts supplied by the CIA referred to Mexican police and government officials involved in drug buys with traffickers who were being targeted by the CIA.

CIA officials denied that the information they passed to the Justice Department would link Mexican of-

ficials to crimes, but admitted they were concerned that Justice Department prosecutions will expose CIA agents and informants in Mexico.

"There are problems with Justice," a source said. "There is information they want to use in prosecutions that would blow sources." The CIA officials claimed the intelligence was intended to give investigators leads and not to be presented as evidence.

On Wednesday the CIA, in a rare formal statement, denied it had targeted Mexican officials with the wiretaps, as reported by The San Diego Union newspaper, but refused to elaborate. "The suggestion that

CIA has been targeting Mexican officials in connection with narcotics trafficking is false," said the statement.

Yesterday, Justice Department officials said that while the wiretap operations had not targeted any Mexican police or government officers, "it is always possible to pick up things you didn't expect."

The CIA has been supplying the Justice Department with wiretap material as part of the Reagan administration's stepped-up war on drugs, said Justice Department officials.

The wiretap material was to be used in several drug prosecutions in

Southern California being prepared by the U.S. Attorney's Office there involving cocaine and heroin smuggling, officials said.

Peter K. Nunez, U.S. attorney in San Diego, came to Washington last week to discuss using the material with Justice Department officials, the officials said.

Mr. Nunez did not return a reporter's calls yesterday.

Federal officials are reluctant to use the information because corruption of police and government officials in Mexico is a politically sensitive issue, said Justice Department officials.

But a senior CIA official in Washington denied that any information passed by the CIA to the Justice Department on drug traffickers showed any corruption by Mexican officials.

The conflict has not been resolved, according to officials.